**Intro**

Welcome to this introduction to *The Believers Are But Brothers,* written and performed by Javaad Alipoor. The play won a Scotsman Fringe First Award at the 2017 Edinburgh Festival. It has been co-directed by Javaad Alipoor and Kirsty Housley.

We should warn you that the age guidance for this performance is 16+. The play includes explicit language, and references to and images of disturbing violence, which may be found offensive.

The audio described performance at the Bush Theatre will take place on Saturday February 3rd. There will be a touch tour at 1.30, the preshow notes will begin at 2.15, and the performance itself at 2.30. It lasts just over one hour and there is no interval.

The describer will be Di Langford.

Writer, theatre maker and performer, **Javaad Alipoor**, is Resident Associate Director at Sheffield Theatres, an Associate Director of Theatre in the Mill, and the Artistic Director of Northern Lines, a theatre company based in Bradford. His work comes from discussions and workshops with communities that don’t usually engage with mainstream theatre.

The following extracts are from an article on the theatre website by the Artistic Director of the Bush Theatre, Maddani Younis. He says:

*‘The Believers Are But Brothers reveals how important technology is to democratise, assimilate, re-imagine, provoke and disturb culture – in a word, it’s power.*

*‘We live in a time where old orders are collapsing: - from the postcolonial nation states of the Middle East, to the EU and the American election. Through it all, tech savvy and extremist groups rip up political certainties.*

*‘Amidst this, a generation of young men find themselves burning with resentment, without the money, power and sex they think they deserve. This crisis of masculinity leads them into an online world of fantasy, violence and reality.*

*He concludes: ‘The play envelops its audience in this digital realm, weaving us into the webs of resentment, violence and power networks that are eating away at the structures of the twentieth century. The Believers Are But Brothers explores the smoke and mirrors world of online extremism, anonymity and hate speech’.*

As part of the play, the smartphone app WhatsApp is used, to help create this online world. If you have a smartphone, you will be offered the option to join a WhatsApp group. This will create an encrypted and private world, which will enable the users to receive and respond to messages for the duration of the performance. Afterwards the contact details of the group will be deleted. If you’d like to join the WhatsApp group, please bring a pair of small in ear headphones for your phone.

It’s important to emphasise that this is not essential. If you do not have a smartphone or prefer not to accept the WhatsApp option, the message of the play is still quite clear, and Di will read out WhatsApp messages as they appear on a large screen during the performance.

As we enter the auditorium there are two ranked banks of seating on the left facing a low stage on the right. The wall at the back of the stage is painted black.

On stage are two long tables, set one in front of the other, standing at a slight angle from left to right, with the right hand end closest to us.

On the left of the table at the front are two small monitors and a speaker connected with trailing wires. Next to them is a pair of headphones and a bottle of water. There’s an open laptop on the right.

The second table stands behind the first and is set slightly to the right. There are more monitors set on this table, facing away from us.

Standing on the floor between the tables is a large frame about 3 metres high by 2 metres wide. Coloured lights flicker across the top of the frame. The upper half of the frame, visible above the surface of the tables, contains a see through screen with a faint textured pattern. During the action images and video content are projected onto this screen.

In front of the screen, the writer, Javaad Alipoor, sits to the left on an office chair on castors. He has his back to us. Javaad is of Middle Eastern descent, and describes himself as mixed race. He’s in his thirties, with thickly-waved brown hair and searching, dark brown eyes. He is dressed casually in a red top, pale blue jeans and red trainers. Javaad is wearing glasses and headphones. His gaze is focussed upon one of the small screens in front of him.

Just visible behind the large screen, on the right of the far table, a young white man sits facing us. He’s dressed in a short sleeved tee shirt and wearing headphones. He is mostly in shadow, but his serious face and black beard are illuminated by a blue glow as he gazes intently at moving images on the monitor in front of him, tapping occasionally on a keyboard, or manipulating the controller of a video wargame. This is the Operator who, without leaving his screen, becomes increasingly implicated in the world of the play.

Small red lights glow and flicker on the state of the art headphones worn by both men. They are engrossed in a game of Call of Duty.

As the audience wait for the performance to begin, some realise that they can use the WhatsApp connection to communicate with other members of the audience. As they watch the two men on stage absorbed in their game, the jokey messages include: Is this the show? I could have had another drink in the bar! They send each other occasional selfies, questionable jokes, cute pictures of dogs and other animals, a dormouse wearing a jumper, a packet of Ritz biscuits, various smileys and emojis, pictures of Jeremy Corbyn.

The jokes continue until eventually Javaad takes off his headphones and puts them on the table. He turns to face us, holds up his mobile and taps out a WhatsApp message, and the play begins.